

LAWYER DISCIPLINE IN WASHINGTON

Below are frequently asked questions about the grievance process. Also see www.wsba.org.

What is the Washington State Bar Association?

The Washington State Bar Association (WSBA) is the organization in Washington state that regulates lawyers under delegated authority from the Washington Supreme Court. It is funded by fees its members pay. The WSBA's Office of Disciplinary Counsel reviews complaints (grievances) against lawyers.

What does it mean to file a grievance?

When you file a grievance, you are accusing a lawyer of unethical conduct. Before you file a grievance, try to resolve your dispute directly with the lawyer.

Who can file a grievance?

Anyone - members of the public, judges, lawyers - can file a grievance against any lawyer.

How do I file a grievance?

All grievances must be in writing. We prefer that you use our online [grievance form](#), which contains additional instructions. We ask that you limit your submission to no more than 25 pages including attachments. If you have additional documents, please refer to them in your submission and say that they are available upon request. Please do not bind or staple documents as we will scan and destroy the documents you submit. Also note that we do not accept cassette tapes, disks, flash drives, or other electronic recordings with your grievance unless you provide a written transcript. We do not accept grievances over the phone. You may file a grievance at any time. There is no fee to file a grievance.

Can you help me file a grievance?

If you have a disability and need help writing your grievance, please call us at 206-727-8207 and we will take reasonable steps to accommodate you. You must submit your grievance in English. We cannot represent you or give you legal advice. We cannot help you decide whether you should file a grievance or what you should say. You can explain your grievance in your own words without referring to ethics rules.

What contact information do you need for me?

We will communicate with you about your grievance in writing. Please provide a current mailing address on your grievance form and inform us if you change your address.

Will the lawyer know that I filed a grievance?

Yes. We will provide your grievance to the lawyer, and we may provide it to others if we investigate your grievance. If you are concerned about disclosing your identity to the lawyer, see [Rule 5.2](#) of the Washington Supreme Court's Rules for Enforcement of Lawyer Conduct (Confidential Sources).

Will filing a grievance affect my court case?

No. However, if you are a client, a lawyer may refuse to represent you after you file a grievance and you may need to find another lawyer. Disciplinary proceedings are not a substitute for protecting your legal rights. We cannot become involved in your case.

Can my grievance become public?

Yes. Your grievance is not public when you file it, but information about your grievance may become public if there is a hearing.

What happens after I file a grievance?

We review your grievance and send a letter to you within two weeks. If we dismiss your grievance, we will tell you why. Generally, if we ask the lawyer to respond, we will send you a copy of the lawyer's response.

What are examples of matters that disciplinary counsel may not investigate?

Fee disputes: Disagreements about the amount of a lawyer's fees.

Rude behavior: Conduct that you think is discourteous or poor customer service.

Errors in judgment: Disagreements about the way a case should be handled, or a mistake.

Opposing lawyer: Conduct that has a negative impact on you but does not involve an ethical violation.

Personal matters: Disputes with neighbors, creditors, or spouses.

What is public discipline?

A final determination that a lawyer violated the Washington Supreme Court's Rules of Professional Conduct may lead to public discipline. Public discipline, which results in a permanent record, includes an admonition, a reprimand, a suspension up to three years, and disbarment. Only the Washington Supreme Court can suspend or disbar a lawyer. A suspended or disbarred lawyer cannot practice law. We publish statistics annually in the [Discipline System Annual Report](#).

